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Cops used Taser and pepper spray

■ By David Lea
OAKVILLE BEAVER STAFF

Halton Regional Police have shown a preference for the Taser over the baton, while pepper spray is also being used effectively to control combative suspects.

These were some of the conclusions reported in the Halton Regional Police Service 2007 Use of Force Analysis.

The report looks at the actions taken by police against suspects over the year, in an effort to determine what techniques are working and where training improvements are needed.

The report noted that during 2007 Halton police filed reports on 207 use-of-force incidents, which must be filed whenever an officer draws a firearm in the presence of a member of the public, discharges a firearm, uses a weapon other than a firearm on another person, or uses physical force on another person that results in an injury requiring medical attention.

The 207 reports in 2007 represented a slight increase from the 201 reports in 2006, but were still below the 225 incidents in 2005.

For 2007, police reported 130 incidents where an officer drew and/or pointed a service handgun or shotgun in the presence of a member of the public.

Police indicated this would often occur when they were responding to a call in which someone had reported a weapon present. Another 34 per cent of firearms drawing incidents occurred during domestic disturbance calls, break and enters, robberies and high-risk traffic stops.

Police reported 35 incidents in which an officer discharged a service handgun or shotgun. Although this represented a 40 per cent increase from 2006, all but one of these was to destroy an animal for humanitarian reasons.

"A deer will get hit by a car and it will be so badly hurt that the only decent thing we can do is put it down," said Deputy Chief Andrew Fletcher, during a Friday meeting of the Halton Regional Police Services Board where the report was discussed.

Other data from the report revealed only one incident of using an expandable baton blocking and striking, while pepper spray was used 26 times in 2007.

Fletcher told board members a baton can be awkward to use in close quarter situations.

Police chalked up pepper spray's 85 per cent success rate in subduing a suspect to regular refresher courses in the weapon's use.

The Taser also saw action in 2007 with officers drawing a Taser in 32 incidents and actually firing it in 17. In all other cases the mere threat of the Taser's use was enough to gain the suspect's co-operation.

Police reported complications in three of the Taser firing incidents. Twice the Taser failed due to mechanical problems, while in one incident the Taser did not work because the suspect was wearing a sweater.

None of the suspects stunned with a Taser in 2007 received any lasting effects.

Hand-to-hand techniques were also used by police in 2007 with 47 incidents reported in which police used 'soft empty hand techniques' including joint locks, defensive blocking and other compliance techniques.

Another 17 incidents involving 'hard empty hand techniques' including punches, kicks and elbow strikes were also reported.

For 2007, police reported one fatal injury sustained by a subject in a police encounter and 29 incidents in which a subject required medical attention — of these 26 were classified as minor.

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